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Poll: Abe stands at 33%, Fukuda at 21% in post-Koizumi race; Cabinet support inches up

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 1) (Abridged)

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May 15, 2006

The Nihon Keizai Shimbun conducted a public opinion survey on May 12-14 to probe into the public choice of an appropriate person for the next prime minister. In this popularity rating, Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe ranked at the top with 33%, and Yasuo Fukuda surged to 21%. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party is scheduled to elect its new president in September. In its run-up, all eyes are on Abe and Fukuda within the LDP. Meanwhile, the Abe-vs.-Fukuda showdown is now being reflected in the general public's awareness as well.

In the survey, the rate of public support for the Koizumi cabinet was 49%, up 1percentage point from the last survey. The disapproval rating was 39%, down 1 point. The Koizumi cabinet's support rate dropped somewhat early this year. However, the Koizumi cabinet, now in office for five years, still sustains considerably high popularity.

In the breakdown of public support for political parties, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party stood at 44%, leveling off from the last time. The leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) was at 24%, up 5percentage points.

The survey was taken by Nikkei Research Inc. over the telephone on a random digit dialing (RDD) basis. For the survey, samples were chosen from among males and females, aged 20 and over, across the nation. A total of 1,499 households with one or more voters were sampled, and answers were obtained from 867 persons (57.8%).

4) Poll: 65% give high marks to Koizumi cabinet's performance

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)

May 15, 2006

In the latest poll, respondents were asked about the Koizumi cabinet's performance over the past five years since it came into office. In response to this question, more than 60% gave affirmative answers, broken down into 20% who "appreciate it" and 45% who "appreciate it to a certain degree." Negative answers were broken down into 16% who "do not appreciate it to a certain degree" and 8% who "do not appreciate it."

The Koizumi cabinet's structural reforms are now under way. In the meantime, the nation's economy is getting back on a recovery track. These factors appear to have been reflected in the general public's positive evaluation of the Koizumi cabinet's performance. Affirmative answers accounted for 84% among those in support of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and 50% even among those in support of the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto).

However, public opinion was split over the nation's social

divide, with 22% saying individual efforts should be rewarded and 20% insisting that the gap should not widen further. Meanwhile, 43% pointed to the necessity of considering how to narrow down the social divide, topping all other answers.

5) Poll: DPJ rebounds to 24% in public support with Ozawa effects

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)

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May 15, 2006

In the latest poll, the rate of public support for the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) has rebounded to 24%. This can be taken as reflecting the public's positive view of the party's new leadership under Ichiro Ozawa. In the survey, respondents were asked to pick a person who they thought would be appropriate for the next prime minister. In response to this question, Ozawa, though he is an opposition leader, ranked third, following Shinzo Abe and Yasuo Fukuda.

The DPJ's approval rating topped 30% right after the House of Councillors election in the summer of 2004. Later, however, the party lost much public support, with its popularity rate plummeting to 19% in a previous survey conducted in March when the party was in turmoil due to its fake email fiasco. In the latest survey, however, the party's public support has recovered somewhat due to the Ozawa effect.

Even so, when asked if the DPJ is competent enough to take office, "yes" answers accounted for only 25%, while "no" reached 59%.

Even among DPJ supporters, "yes" accounted for 46%, with "no" at 47%.

6) Poll: Abe marks 38%, Fukuda at 20% in post-Koizumi race

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Abridged)

May 15, 2006

The Mainichi Shimbun conducted a telephone-based public opinion survey across the nation on May 13-14. In the survey, respondents were asked to pick one from among six lawmakers in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party as the most appropriate person for the next prime minister. In response to this question, Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe topped all others at 38%, followed by one of

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his predecessors, Yasuo Fukuda, at 20%, respectively up 2 percentage points from a previous survey taken in April. The post-Koizumi race is now being narrowed down to the two.

In the survey, respondents were further asked what they would like the next prime minister to pursue first. Among those who sought to improve Japan's relations with China and South Korea, Fukuda was 6 points higher than Abe. This shows that Fukuda is favored by those opposing Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.

Among others, Foreign Minister Taro Aso stood at 3%, leveling from the last time, with Finance Minister Sadakazu Tanigaki at 3%, up 2 points. Meanwhile, Senior Vice Justice Minister Taro Kono, who has announced his intention to run in the race, was at 2%.

Among LDP supporters, Abe stood at 54%, overwhelming all others. Fukuda was at 16%. Among those in support of the Koizumi cabinet as well, Abe overwhelmed all others at 48%, with Fukuda at 15%. Among those not in support of the Koizumi cabinet, Abe was at 27%, with Fukuda rising to 30%.

Respondents were also asked what they would like the next prime minister to pursue. In response to this question, 29% picked economic recovery, topping all other answers. However, the proportion of those who want the next prime minister to improve

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Japan's relations with China and South Korea also rose 3 points from the last survey to 14% in the latest survey.

The rate of public support for the Koizumi cabinet was 50%, up 2 points from the last survey, and rebounded to the 50% level for the first time in about four months since it last marked 52% in January this year. The nonsupport rate for the Koizumi cabinet was 36%, flat from the last time.

7) Poll: DPJ rebounds to 20% in public support

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Abridged)
May 15, 2006

The leading Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) stood at 20% in public support, showing a rise of 8percentage points from the last survey conducted in April before Ichiro Ozawa became the party's new president. The DPJ's support rate is now back to the same level as the 20% rating in this February's survey before its fake email fiasco. In the survey, respondents were also asked if they had expectations for the DPJ under Ozawa's leadership. In response to this question, "yes" answers accounted for 53%, with "no" at 41%. As seen from these figures, the proportion of affirmative answers was 12 points higher than that of negative answers. This shows that the party's new leadership under Ozawa has led to its recovery of public trust. Among other parties, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party stood at 31%, down 2 points from the last time; the New Komeito party, a coalition partner of the LDP, was at 6%, up 3 points; and the Japan Communist Party at 2%, down 1 point. The proportion of those who have no party to support was 35%, down 8 points, and was almost flat from 36% in this February's survey. This can be taken as indicating that unaffiliated voters who used to be in support of the DPJ came back to support the DPJ.

8) US congressman in his letter to House speaker letter urges Japanese prime minister to "assure he would not visit Yasukuni" in connection with prime minister's desire to deliver speech before US Congress

ASAHI (Page 1) (Excerpts)
Eve. May 13, 2006

Yoshiyuki Komurata, Kei Ukai, Washington

US House Committee on International Relations Henry Hyde, 82, sent a letter to House of Representatives Speaker Dennis Hastert urging that Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who is planned to travel to the United States in late June, "needs to declare on his own initiative that he will not visit Yasukuni Shrine" if he intends to make a speech before the US Congress -- an event that the Japanese government is trying to bring about during the prime minister's visit, a source revealed yesterday. The letter essentially warned the prime minister against visiting the shrine around the anniversary of the end of World War II in August.

According to a US congressional source, the letter, which was sent to Japan in late April, basically welcomed a speech by the prime minister before the Congress as a representative of one of the strong allies backing the US in military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, the senior congressman expressed concern about a possible fallout from the prime

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minister's visit to Yasukuni Shrine if it occurs several weeks after his address at the Congress, pointing out that if the prime minister pays his respect to Class A war criminals, including former Prime Minister Hideki Tojo, who decided to launch an attack on Pearl Harbor and is now enshrined at Yasukuni, his behavior would dishonor the Congress, where President Franklin Roosevelt made a speech right after the Pearl Harbor attack.

Additionally, the letter noted that the generation that remembers the attack on Pearl Harbor, would feel concern about a negative

impact from the prime minister's speech if followed by his shrine visit, and even may feel insulted. The letter reportedly urged Japan "to take some steps to convince the Congress and ensure that after a speech, the prime minister will not visit the shrine."

Japan, which wants to underscore the good Japan-US relationship, is looking for ways for the prime minister to deliver a speech at a joint session of the House and the Senate during his US visit.

9) Baker entertains Fukuda warmly at private residence

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)
May 15, 2006

Hiroyuki Kano, Washington

Former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda, now visiting the US, stayed at the private residence of former Ambassador to Japan Baker in Tennessee May 11-13, local time. Baker warmly entertained Fukuda, welcoming and sending him off by his private jet plane. Baker, who worked to set up meetings between Fukuda and US prominent figures, including Vice President Cheney, exchanged views with the pro-China Fukuda on "improvement in Japan-China relations," according to informed sources.

Meeting for more than 100 times with Fukuda when he was serving as ambassador to Japan, Baker engaged in coordinating views on such difficult issues as the dispatch of Self-Defense Force troops to Iraq. In a speech just before stepping down in January of last year, the ambassador played up his close ties with Fukuda, saying: "He is my counterpart and good friend." During the US tour, Fukuda fully made use of Baker's network of personal connections, in a sense.

Fukuda also met members of the Congress, including Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Lugar, as well as officials of think tanks. During such meetings, Fukuda "stressed the importance of strengthening relations between Japan and China," said an informed source.

Baker used to always say: "It is necessary for Japan and China to try to find out ways to cooperate with each other." In part because Asia diplomacy will be a major controversial issue in the Liberal Democratic Party presidential race in September, the US' hospitality toward Fukuda might reflect its expectations for improvement in the current strained Japan-China ties.

10) Japan, South Korea to give up talks on EEZ demarcation this month

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)

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May 15, 2006

Talks on demarcating an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) planned for this month by the Japanese and South Korean governments are now likely to slip to June. If a Japan-South Korea foreign ministerial is held on the sideline of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) to start on May 23 in Qatar, Foreign Minister Taro Aso will call on his counterpart Ban Ki-moon to resume the talks in June.

The major reason for the delay is the unified local elections in South Korea on May 31. The outcome of the elections will greatly affect the South Korean presidential race later next year. Seoul apparently has taken the view that "an indication of a conciliatory stance in EEZ negotiations with Japan will have a major effect on the election campaigning," according to a source connected with Japan-South Korea relations.

11) Consulate said "Official committed suicide because of work stress" in death certificate it signed and handed to Shanghai police; China uses this as evidence that denies blackmailing official

YOMIURI (Top play) (Excerpts)
May 15, 2006

A 46-year-old official at the Japanese Consulate General in Shanghai committed suicide in May 2004, leaving behind a suicide note in which he said he had been pressed by a Chinese intelligence agent to divulge classified diplomatic information. In connection with this incident, this newspaper learned yesterday that the Consulate General had signed a death certificate to explain that the suicide resulted from "heavy work pressure" without revealing the official's suicide note to Chinese police. The Chinese side has used this document as evidence to deny the Chinese government's involvement in the suicide incident, saying, "The Chinese government had nothing to do with the incident." This document has caused both sides to fail to reach a settlement of the suicide incident. Consulate officials, thinking that retrieving the diplomat's corpse was the first priority matter, signed the document, but the Foreign Ministry's behavior of this sort is again being called into question.

According to a report filed by a fact-finding team the Foreign Ministry sent to Shanghai to investigate the suicide, if foreign nationals die in China, a death certificate issued by Chinese authorities is required before cremation can take place or a body can be retrieved. In the suicide case this time, after consulate officials had taken the diplomat's body to a hospital, Shanghai police officers examined the body and produced the document.

According to a concerned source, consulate officials already grasped the details of the suicide note revealing, for instance, that the diplomat had been persistently pressed by a Chinese intelligence agent to provide classified information. But they judged, "If the truth had been conveyed to the Chinese side, Chinese intelligence authorities, fearing a possible leakage of the truth, might have refused to hand over the body to his relatives." The Consulate General eventually explained that the cause of the suicide had been "work pressure" and its official signed the document in which such a cause was written.

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12) Nukaga rejects Lawless statement

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
May 15, 2006

Touching on US Deputy Defense Under Secretary Richard Lawless' estimate of Japan's share for US force realignment at 3 trillion yen, Defense Agency Director General Fukushima Nukaga, appearing on a TV Asahi program yesterday, brushed aside Lawless' explanation that he had obtained basic information from a Japanese partner. Nukaga said: "I don't think he presented the figure based on Japan's estimate. We are going to present our own figure by tallying up specifics."

13) US force realignment: Contents of special measures legislation revealed; Separate economic stimulus measures for Nago, Iwakuni, continued employment after return of bases

SANKEI (Top play) (Excerpts)
May 15, 2006

The contents of a special measures bill to promote US force realignment was revealed yesterday. The legislation has three main elements: (1) local economic promotional measures; (2) job measures for base workers and measure to promote the use of US base land being returned; and (3) a special exception for the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) to become involved. The legislation is also designed to designate "special areas" and establish separate economic packages, with Okinawa's Nago City and Yamaguchi's Iwakuni City in mind. The legislation also specifies keeping base workers employed by means of personnel transfers as US bases in Okinawa are returned.

The special measures bill for smooth implementation of US force realignment will be a time-limited legislation valid for ten years. The legislation also calls for the establishment of a US force realignment council in the Cabinet Office composed of relevant cabinet ministers and chaired by the prime minister.

Local economic development will be in two stages. The government will designate bases mentioned in the US force realignment final report as "realignment-related special facilities" and provide subsidies to municipalities hosting those facilities for having to bear greater burdens. The government will also adopt a system to designate jet-accommodating bases as "special defense facilities" and apply the existing law for improving the living environment for communities near existing defense facilities by expanding the scope of government subsidies that cover industrial promotion and the like.

The government will additionally designate municipalities that will shoulder greater burdens as realignment-related special areas, such as Okinawa's Nago, the relocation site for Futenma Air Station, and Yamaguchi's Iwakuni, which will host carrier-based aircraft now based at the Atsugi base. For those municipalities, the government will provide handsome economic packages, including social welfare services, by modeling the program on the system used to provide subsidies to municipalities that accepted nuclear power plants.

Coordination for designating the municipalities will under the

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prime minister and the realignment-related council to be established in the Cabinet Office. To ensure the efficacy of the realignment plan, decisions will be made based on the progress of the plan, such as local governments' announcement of acceptance of bases.

To avoid returned US facilities causing fiscal burdens on local governments, the central government will adopt certain measures, such as transferring or leasing returned land to municipalities free or at low rates.

Main points in US force realignment facilitation special measures legislation

1. The legislation is valid for only ten years.
2. Establish a realignment-related council in the Cabinet Office chaired by the prime minister.
3. Designate realignment-related special defense facilities to provide subsidies with municipalities in the vicinity.
4. Map out promotional plans for areas that will bear greater burdens as a result of US force realignment.
5. Continue employing as many base workers as possibly by means of personnel transfers even after bases are returned.
6. Transfer or lease returned land to municipalities and other entities for free or at low rates.
7. Specify investment in and loans to Guam as a special case under the operations of the Japan Bank for International Cooperation.

14) DFAA to punish 60 officials; Most senior officials admitted to rigged-bidding, according to an in-house investigation; Former construction chief instructed destruction of evidence

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Top play) (Lead paragraph)
May 15, 2006

An in-house investigation by the Defense Facilities Administration Agency's (DFAA) investigative committee revealed that ahead of a raid by a task force of the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office on the DFAA as part of investigations into the bureaucrat-initiated bid-rigging scandals involving the agency, former DFAA Construction Department director general had instructed via his staff to destruct evidence of the big-rigging list to determine successful tenderers. As this move came after Defense Agency (JDA) Director-General Fukushima Nukaga had instructed all the staff to cooperate on the investigations,

Nukaga's leadership capabilities as well as the supervisory responsibility of DFAA Director-General Iwao Kitahara are likely to be called into question. When asked by the investigative team about bid-rigging cases, most senior officials at the Construction Department said, "They were aware of them." The DFAA intends to punish some 60 its officials at the assistant division director level or above by suspending them from office or cutting their salaries.

15) Resumption of US beef imports; Government intends to reach agreement before bilateral summit; US ends re-inspection of beef processing plants

YOMIURI (Page 9) (Full)
May 13, 2006

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A second ban continues on US beef imports, following the inclusion of vertebral columns in US beef shipment after the lifting of the first ban. In resolving this issue, the government on May 12 decided to aim at reaching an agreement to resume beef trade before the Japan-US summit meeting, slated for late June. This was revealed by several government sources. Both Tokyo and Washington intend to avoid making a political decision on the resumption of US beef imports by Japan. They will work out conditions for resuming imports that can obtain the understanding of Japanese consumers during an experts meeting to be held within a week.

The US has completed reinspections of 37 meat-processing plants that are authorized to export products to Japan. It will submit a report to Japan and then hold the experts meeting to discuss a timetable for resuming imports and the conditions for such. The Japanese side intends to ask for certain details, such as conditions for resuming imports and a method of determining safety, during the experts meeting.

The US has indicated its readiness to approve inspections of meat packers by Japanese inspectors prior to the resumption of imports, as well as their accompanying US inspectors when they carry out surprise inspections after the beef trade is reinstated. The US also plans to explain the circumstances in which vertebral columns, banned for safety concerns, were included in its shipments to Hong Kong and Taiwan. There are now few grounds left for Japan to continue to reject US beef imports, according to a government source. The Japanese side is now having the Prime Minister's official residence (Kantei) and relevant government agencies look into the possibility of reinforcing quarantine officials.

The government wants to come up with a decision to resume US beef imports before the US-Japan summit, because such a decision after the meeting could incur criticism, such as that Japan decided to import US beef under pressure from the US. It intends to hold town meetings with consumers to discuss conditions for resuming the beef set at the experts meeting and the lift the ban, if it can in principle obtain the understanding of consumers. It will resume imports after the determining of the safety of US facilities by Japanese inspections.

However, some government officials are still wary of such a process with one official noting: "If the government rushes to decide to resume US beef imports and a problem occurs afterwards, it will be held responsible for what happened and consumers will never buy US beef again."

16) Town meeting with consumers in Tokyo; Voices of concern over safety of US beef still pronounced; Tokyo, Washington to hold experts meeting possibly in middle of this week

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 3) (Full)
May 15, 2006

The government yesterday held a town meeting with citizens in Tokyo to discuss agricultural policy reform and international

agricultural talks. Many participants voiced their wariness over safety and peace of mind concerning food, including safety of US beef, whose imports are currently under suspension, and the drop in the rate of Japan's food self-sufficiency.

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Approximately 400 people, including company employees and students, took part in the town meeting. Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Shoichi Nakagawa represented the central government. A number of participants, showing high interest in US beef, called on the government to deal with the import resumption issue in a cautious manner. Their views included such statements as: "Safety is not respected in the international society"; and, "Do consumers have to ensure the safety of beef on their own responsibility?"

Nakagawa replied that the government would thoroughly manage risk control, noting, "The objective of this town meeting is not only the resumption of US beef imports but also to allow consumers to eat beef with peace of mind." Commenting on Japan-US talks on the resumption of US beef imports, Nakagawa during a press conference held after the meeting said, "A team of US experts is expected to visit Japan shortly." He indicated that a meeting of Japanese and US government experts would take place soon. That meeting will likely be held for a couple of days starting in the middle of this week.

17) Koizumi, Ozawa to engage in first head-on Diet battle on May 17

SANKEI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
May 15, 2006

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) President Ichiro Ozawa will engage in a head-on battle for the first time in the party heads debate in the Diet on May 17. One month has passed since Ozawa assumed the post of party president, bearing on his shoulder the party members' expectations that he can rejuvenate Minshuto. If Ozawa gains the edge in the debate by demonstrating his own policy stance over that of Koizumi, who is still enjoying high support rates even after five years in office, it could have an impact on Diet strategy in the final phase of the current session and on the outcome of the Liberal Democratic Party's presidential race.

"Phony politics have been carried out over the last five years": said Ozawa during a speech in Nagata blasting Koizumi's political style, giving a preview of the 45-minute head-to-head battle with the prime minister that will soon take place. He stressed that the House of Councillors election next year would be "a decisive battle."

For Ozawa, "the upcoming party head battle comes at the best time," said a senior Minshuto member. In the by-election in Chiba's 7th District for the House of Representatives held just after Ozawa assumed office, the Minshuto-backed candidate defeated the LDP candidate after a hard-fought game, and public support rates for Minshuto are also rising. Expectations of Ozawa are growing in the party, Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama saying: "He will ask and answer questions that make the public think that the two leaders are on different levels."

Ozawa is poised to grill Koizumi over specific issues. Included the government's bill to amend the Fundamental Law of Education. Minshuto drafted its own counterproposal on May 12. Out of consideration to the New Komeito, which is cautious about "patriotism," the government used only this expression: "a mind

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that loves the nation and homeland." But Minshuto's draft specified, "(Aimed education) is to foster a mind that loves Japan." It also included "fostering religious sensitivity." The current law includes the wording "without obeying improper

commands," a provision that has been viewed as the basis for allowing the Japan Teachers' Union to control the field of education. Minshuto's draft deleted this part.

A senior Minshuto member was overheard saying: "Conservative members in the LDP might be willing in their hearts to support the Minshuto draft." A senior member of the party's Diet Affairs Committee eagerly said prior to the party head debate: "We would like to play up our policy stance that is different from the prime minister's negative stance toward educational issues."

In addition, the opposition party is considering taking up such issues as Japan's share of the US force realignment cost and income disparity.

SCHIEFFER